DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 233 FL 018 500

AUTHOR White, Ron
TITLE Laying It On the Line.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 35p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Classroom Research; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Language Teachers; Second Language Instruction; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Role; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes
IDENTIFIERS Japanese People; University of Reading (England)

ABSTRACT

A college writing teacher relates his experiences in teaching writing to a group of Japanese undergraduates with a process-oriented curriculum. The narrative and analysis are based on the teacher's journal record of the 10-week course. The narrative focuses on the investigation of the curriculum's implementation, the teacher's reaction to the use of techniques used with other students and advocated to other teachers, and student behavior and achievement outcomes. The report describes the students' characteristics, the teachers teaching the course, and the specific aims, methods, and procedures used in classroom presentation. The author's journal entries, written responses to student writing, and some writing samples are included and expanded. Student evaluations of the course are also presented. Personal, pedagogic, and academic lessons learned from the experience are discussed briefly. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED319233

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
R. White
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Laying It on the Line

Ron White
Centre for Applied Language Studies
University of Reading
England

Introduction

Much of the writing literature consists of research in which the subjects are native language writers. There are, of course, notable exceptions: Arndt (1987), Hudelson (1989), Jones and Tetroe (1987), Keller & Mitrano-Neto (1987), Mohan & Au-Yuen Lo (1985), Raimes (1985 & 1987), Rob, Ross & Shortreed (1986), Spack (1988), Urzua (1987), and Zamel (1983, 1987, 1988). Some of the literature focuses on the student, e.g. Arndt, Jones and Tetroe, Urzua, Raimes and Zamel (1983, 1988). This work has given us insights into how students behave when composing in a second language, from which we see that while there are differences between composing in first and second language, the two processes may not be substantially different.

There are, however, comparatively few studies of the teaching of writing in the EFL context and there is a shortage of classroom-based studies which focus on what the teacher is doing, thinking and feeling. Any studies of this kind are inevitably faced with a highly complex set of variables, particularly if priority has to be given to administrative and convenience rather than to research considerations when carrying out the study. Furthermore, there is a host of day to day considerations which teaching -- and the teacher -- have to take into account and which make research, even within an action research framework, subject to many practical constraints.

The investigation which lead to this paper being written was carried out with some of these constraints in mind. I wanted to keep a record over a ten week teaching term of what happened when I taught writing to a group of Japanese undergraduates. To the extent that was possible within a relatively privileged situation -- a well resourced university language centre -- I hoped to look at the implementation of a writing programme which, from my knowledge of the students' previous English learning experience, I knew would be an innovation for them. I also wanted to find out how I myself would react as a teacher, using techniques which I had employed with other students, both in my own department and elsewhere, and which I had also been advocating to teachers in my role as in-service course provide and handbook author. Finally, I wanted to see if, as a result of my teaching, there would be any discernible outcomes in terms of changes in student behaviour and improvements in the quality of student product. In short, I wanted to lay it on the line -- to look fairly unflinchingly at what happened to me and the students I taught during the summer term of 1989.

My approach has been that of the case study, based on my own journal records, on the observations and notes of a colleague, on evaluation by students, and on the writing that the students themselves produced. This approach and my data have their limitations. They may lack the rigour of controlled research, but they may provide insights and raise issues which can subsequently be investigated in a more rigorous way. Case studies such as this tend to be low on generalizability, but they can be high on relatability, and there may be issues which arise from the work reported here that will stimulate other teachers with similar experiences to reflect upon and report them so that we can construct a more complete picture of life in the EFL writing classroom.

Part of the problem that I faced at the beginning of the summer term 1989 may be represented by this test essay, written by Mitsuo, one of the twelve students who attended my twice weekly writing classes for ten weeks. We shall be looking at more of Mitsuo's work later, as I have taken him as the exemplar for his class.

© Ron White, 1990

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FL018500

Reather and food is very prise down.

Shop's man is careful.

Always very prise down.

I went to shopping for three days;.

I want to buy sheet.

If my room is very cold in the morning.

I don't understand that English shop rest on Sunday.

Japanese shop don't understand and impossible.

I bought the bicycle on Saturday.

It's 120£ and black color.

It's very nice.

But I ride its.

Because it was stolen on Sunday.

I have to the o'clock.

Because it was broken.

Only shopping may not speak English.

My reactions on receiving a dozen essays, of which his was by no means the worst, were ones of mild panic. But, before we consider how I dealt with that sinking feeling, I would like to go over some of the background to the teaching program, of which my composing course was a part.

Background: the Students

In April 1989 a group of 35 Japanese students arrived in Reading, England as the first intake in a liberal arts college established by the Gyosei Foundation, a 19th century Catholic educational foundation originally set up to improve the education of Japanese school children. Many of the students had traveled abroad before. One had been on student exchange to the States. Three had been at boarding schools in Europe. Some came from families with a globally mobile father, while all belonged to families who could consider spending at least £10,000 a year educating their child abroad. With the exception of the students who had been in schools overseas, all had been through the Examination Hell which is part of the attempt to gain a place in a prestigious Japanese university, and it appears that most if not all of them had failed to achieve this prized goal, which was surprising, as subsequent acquaintance with the students suggested that the best of them are intellectually able.

All students had learnt English for a minimum of five years in the Japanese high school system. By their own account, they had done virtually no writing in English other than

 © Ron White, 1990

translating sentences from Japanese to English, and the priority of their teachers had been grammatical accuracy and correct spelling rather than content or meaning.

The students' experience of writing in Japanese included composing essays, poems and stories. Typically, the teacher would give them a topic, and after some discussion, students would write, either in class or as homework. The teacher would mark the assignment and return it with some corrections, but with no response to the ideas embodied in what they had written. At most, the teacher might show them how to phrase something differently.

Although the question was never raised, it appeared from their writing behaviour in class that their previous writing experience must have been remarkably similar, regardless of where they attended high school. In particular, all students wrote in pencil and used an eraser to change or correct what they had written. The uniformity of this behaviour compared with students from other countries was a striking feature of their work in class.

On arriving in Reading, the students were distributed around university halls of residence -- which proved to be their first major cultural shock -- and, having settled in and shaken off their jet lag, they reported for their first classes. They had been streamed on the basis of an unvalidated test which they had taken as part of the selection procedures for the college, and this was now supplemented by a series of tests given to them during the first two days of their course at Reading, as result of which some fine tuning of class grouping could be carried out. It was unfortunate, though, that in terms of base-line data for appraising subsequent improvement, we lacked standardized test data.

Background: the Teachers

Meanwhile, the teachers were getting ready to teach a group whose characteristics were a largely unknown quantity . Although the department has long-standing experience of teaching similar Japanese students, this experience was based on courses lasting a matter of weeks rather than months. With the Gyosei group we were going to be working over three terms of ten weeks each -- a very different situation, as we were to discover. Furthermore, our job was to prepare the students for entry into English medium education at tertiary level because all of them would be taking subject courses in English and, indeed, it was intended that, depending on their ability, students would have the choice of a stream leading to regular Reading University undergraduate courses in such subjects as economics and business studies.

Given the importance of integrating students into the English-speaking community that they had now entered, one of the aims of the first term course was to develop their spoken interaction skills which, with a few exceptions, were demonstrably weak. Allied to this was the aim to activate what we assumed would be an extensive formal knowledge of English grammar. And, since they were destined to study in English, it was clear that written language skills also had to be given priority.

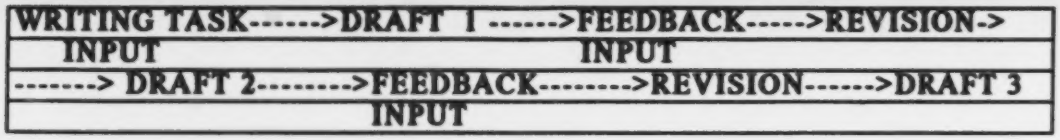
All of the teachers were experienced practitioners, and all, with one exception, had Masters degrees in applied linguistics, the one exception being two thirds of the way through her Masters in TEFL. All teachers were unanimous on approaching their teaching in a way which would encourage student participation and involvement, including taking more responsibility for their own learning than we knew would have been the case in Japan. Among the means to this end would be the keeping of student journals which would enable students and teachers to engage in a written dialogue on learning matters.

Background: the Course

I will now turn from a consideration of general background to the Gyosei programme to the aims and methods of the writing course.

We decided that the writing course would attempt to put into practice the precepts of a process approach, along the following lines.

 © Ron White, 1990



The sequence of stages depicted here was to form the basis of a lesson or series of lessons. Students would be encouraged to generate and organize ideas, to draft and redraft while making use of feedback from each other and from their teacher. There was to be a minimum of language focused work so as to avoid turning composing lessons into language lessons. Instead, language corrections would be offered covertly by way of reformulation or written responses to what students had written, the teacher reacting first in the role of reader and secondly in that of teacher.

In addition to specifying a basic approach, we established the following objectives for the syllabus.

By the end of the term, students should be able to

- complete printed forms accurately and legibly
- relay accurately an item of spoken information in writing
- write letters to specified recipients
- generate original ideas for a specified topic and purpose
- identify a purpose, thesis and viewpoint
- organize ideas in such a way as to take account of the reader's existing knowledge and expectations
- organize ideas in such a way as to most effectively express the writer's purpose, thesis and viewpoint
- develop a means of expression which will indicate the writer's attitude and viewpoint
- use where appropriate, heuristic devices to generate and organize ideas
- apply appropriate criteria to evaluate the content, organization and expression of their own writing in line with the audience and purpose
- revise successive drafts in line with these criteria
- edit the penultimate draft for surface features of language form, punctuation and other such conventions
- summarize the gist of their own and other's writing
- make effective use of a dictionary or thesaurus
- make effective use of the peer group for generating and evaluating
- make use of other people's writing as a form of guidance in matters of organization, expression and style
- make effective use of conventions of layout, headings and illustrations

 © Ron White, 1990

Finally, since we felt that a course needs some kind of thematic basis, each week was to have a general theme.

Weeks 1 & 2

Making Yourself at Home

Weeks 3 & 4

Myself and my environment: Reading

Week 5

Review
Test

Weeks 6 & 7

My environment: England

Weeks 8 & 9

My culture: the UK and Japan

Week 10

Round up
Tests

The selection of topics was to prove to be a continuing problem, however, because content and purpose are so closely related to the question of student interest and motivation and, by extension, to the commitment of the writer to a writing task.

The Course: What Happened

Having prepared an outline plan for the composition course, we met the students, gave them a test, and received the first samples of their written work, which led to a sinking feeling as I read essay after essay from the lowest of the three groups into which the students were streamed. I reacted to Mituso's and his fellow students' work in two ways. Firstly, as composition co-ordinator, I had to provide some guidelines to my fellow teachers. Here is what I wrote to my colleagues after having considered these first writing samples.

As is clear from some of the work, the students' capacity to produce coherent (let alone grammatically accurate) written work is in the worst cases extremely limited. What I suggest we do is

1. Note specifically language problems, including

   sentence structure
   morphology
   spelling (notably /ʌ/ /ɒ/ confusion)

2. Collate these language problems so that we can deal with them in a concerted fashion in the language study rather than the writing parts of the course

3. Note organizational problems

 © Ron White, 1990

4. Respond to the students writing by focussing

a) on meaning

b) on good points (yes, I know this may take some doing)

5. Either write (or word process) individual comments to students and possibly reformulate part of their text

OR

Have an individual conference with each student in which we focus on meaning and try to get at what ideas the student was trying to communicate. Where necessary, help them to express these ideas.

6. Have students do a second draft, incorporating improvements suggested by our response and the conferencing.

Attached you will find some conferencing suggestions.

It is important to try to get them to consider

a) Who is your reader (the teacher in this case)

b) What do you think your teacher would want to know about your ideas on shopping -- maybe get at such points as comparison with Japan, surprise at UK shopping, reactions to first time shopping in UK, puzzling experiences with accents of shop assistants, money, etc.

c) Try to move to a higher level of generalization based on individual experiences. For instance, what is the significance of having trouble with shop assistants' accents and what does the new currency symbolize or epitomize?

d) How could the central idea be developed? What illustrations would the reader find interesting? Illuminating? What details of shopping experience would be interesting?

e) Exchange papers with a partner, and try to give a three word title which summarizes the main idea that the writer is trying to put over. Students to discuss titles and whether they really reflect what the writer intended. If not, how to improve the text?

During the double period, students should have time to go through the above and to produce a second draft to be handed in.

Meanwhile, I had recorded my own reactions as I marked these first essays.

2nd May
An indictment of five or six years compulsory study of English. The reader really has to work at obtaining meaning from these texts. Some are better than others, but all exhibit fundamental weaknesses of language and writing. One of the problems seems to be that the writers haven't thought about their audience. The reader is puzzled because of some of the assumptions which the writers appear to make, viz. that the reader has some understanding of Japan or of the background references that they make.

 © Ron White, 1990

Clearly, helping these students to develop both their language and the writing is going to be a very tough job.

2nd May (later)
Have now read and responded to test essays. It took 2 hours! Am getting into the swing of reacting to what SS have written, which, among other things, involves paraphrasing and replying to what they have written. I shall have to point out to them that my response includes language and ideas which they can incorporate in their 2nd draft. I will also issue the Norman Coe student marking code. I hope that they are not too fazed by the way in which their work is being reacted to. Perhaps the references to the grammar book will help mollify those who feel that they need language correction.

Note
Two SS appear to have drafted their essays in Japanese and then translated.

Although experience of writing responses to students' writing does reduce the time that it takes, the two hours which I took on this first batch of papers was about average. Each text had to be read at least twice. Firstly, there was a quick scan read to obtain an overview of what the students had written. Next,
I went through the text in detail, identifying points to react to as a reader, and finding ways of reformulating malformed text. Finally, I considered specific grammatical points. In this first response, I directed the students to appropriate parts of the grammar book with which they had been issued.

Here is what I wrote to Mitsuo in response to his shopping essay. In retrospect, I included information -- the reference to shopping legislation -- which was unnecessary, but this was part of my attempt to show that I really was reacting to what Mitsuo had written. Similarly, my piece of advice on taking care of bicycles was part of my attempt to establish a dialogue in my response to the content of his text. I also wanted to show him that there really were parts of his text which I didn't fully understand, however, and my questions were intended to be a way of showing that I both wanted and needed clarification. Thus, my response contained a mixture of affirmative reaction on my part and requests for clarification.

Dear Mitsuo

I am interested to learn that you think leather goods and food are cheap in England. Are they cheaper than in Japan? Can you give examples of the differences in price?

I am not surprised that you found it necessary to buy a *blanket* (not a sheet -- sheets are made of cotton and are not warm) because of the cold weather.

You find the shopping hours unusual. For some years, there have been attempts to change the shopping hours. In Scotland, for instance, shops are open on Sundays. And even in England, some shops are open.

What do you mean by

> Japanese shop don't understand and impossible?

I was very sorry indeed to learn that your new bicycle was stolen. Unfortunately, you have to be very, very careful with bicycles and other things. Did you lock your bicycle? If you don't lock your bicycle with a good chain and lock, it will be stolen, as you have discovered.

 © Ron White, 1990

Did you ride your bicycle before it was stolen? Did you go anywhere on your bicycle?

What do you mean by

I have to the o'clock.

And you say

because it was broken.

What was broken?

Do you mean that your alarm clock was broken?

You also say

only shopping may not speak English.

I am not sure what you mean by this. Can you explain?

Can you rewrite your essay on shopping, answering some of my questions? Also, refer to your English Grammar in Use, unit 61.4 , for the correct pattern for the verb *shop*.

Yours

Although writing such responses to the students could be onerous -- and certainly, there were times late at night or early in the morning when it was only a strong sense of duty which impelled me to sit down at the Macintosh and do my homework -- my general feeling even after a term's work can be summed up in my diary entry during that first week.

> Responding to the message actually more fun than reacting to the language alone! One gets the feeling of reading rather than marking. Wonder how SS will feel about my reactions?

I was soon to learn because later than day I had met them for our first writing class. Five of the ten students were very late and I learnt that one of them had had his bike stolen. (In fact, during the first week, six of the students had their newly purchased bicycles stolen). At least I could now make more sense of part of Mitsuo's Shopping essay.

It was not the bicycle thefts that were of most concern to me, though. What had really hit me was that the students seemed not to understand a word that I said. And not only that -- few of them spoke, and those few who did, did so with considerable reluctance and/or difficulty. One of the late comers -- who subsequently proved to be the star student -- was clearly as frustrated as I was with the lack of communication that characterized our first encounter. But, what really worried me was that the basis of our composing course was likely to be seriously undermined by the communication gap which existed between me and the students.

With these thoughts uppermost in my mind, I distributed my responses to their *Shopping* essays and observed their reactions. They read them silently, some making annotations in Japanese, aided by their bilingual dictionaries. I hovered, like a debutante at her first ball, and like many a debutante, I decided to make the plunge, in this case by seeing each student

 © Ron White, 1990

individually. This proved to be as difficult as can be imagined when any two people who are thrown together for the first time. My diary comment reveals that it was, indeed,

> Hard work. Most seem to find the greatest difficulty in articulating anything in English, which makes interaction and discussion difficult.

And it wasn't only interaction that was difficult. Classroom management proved to be a problem, too. I had assumed that the students would be able to get on with their redrafting while I was conferencing and it will be recalled that one or our objectives was to encourage student autonomy. My notes indicate that some thought would need to be given to structuring the class so that students had a clearly defined task to get on with while conferencing was in progress.

> While I was 'conferencing' with individuals, the rest of the class were supposed to get on with rewriting their essays. Not much progress. As the class proceeded, the level of talk rose.

Not surprisingly, the talk was in Japanese. There is nothing wrong with that, except that, as a non-Japanese speaker, I was inevitably left with a feeling of being excluded. What were they talking about? Me? Their essays? Last night's party? The stolen bicycles? I felt inhibited about asking, partly because I believed that they needed to settle in and that talking to each other in Japanese might help, and partly because I had already decided --wrongly perhaps -- that they would probably find it so difficult to render in English what they had been discussing with such animation in Japanese that any attempt to do so would be embarrassing on both sides, with them at a loss for English words and me standing there like a parent encouraging the first steps of an infant child. Not, I decided, a recipe for successful interaction.

Conferencing

Meanwhile, back at my desk with my one-to-one conferencing, a certain sense of desperation had set in because I

> found myself slipping into language correcting with some students, or else putting words into their mouths. Altogether, a daunting task lies ahead. Brainstorming, here we come!

So, ended my first lesson. To put it mildly, I was somewhat crest-fallen, and my journal entry following the second lesson begin on a pessimistic note.

> Again, doubts arise as we plug on with process writing and the very low level of language of the students makes interaction and discussion difficult.

There was, fortunately, a benefit in individual conferencing because I found that it

> is much more successful than attempting to elicit answers with the whole class.

Students proved to be very reluctant to answer, even when nominated, and only two of the group -- Asako and Shun -- seemed willing to answer. Not surprisingly, these were two who showed themselves to be the most committed and proficient language learners and one of them, Shun, was later to be promoted to a higher group, which meant that I lost one of my most promising students. This, as I then discovered, was a mildly demoralizing experience because it meant that I had lost one of the few students who was rewarding me as the teacher. With such an unresponsive class, the loss of a student who can and will respond to the teacher leaves a noticeable gap in the discourse arena.

The more intimate and less threatening relationship found in one-to-one conferencing not only suited the students better than attempts at discussion in the open classroom; it also enabled me to learn about the students as individuals because, when we came to discuss the texts that they had written about themselves,

 © Ron White, 1990

I found out bits and pieces about the students which became part of their essays. For example, several live in two-storey houses, with quite a lot of rooms and one of them -- Mitsuo -- his father is a pastor, with an office in Yokohama (I think). Clearly, there is more to be learnt about Dad, especially as he drives a Nissan President (top of the range) and Mum has a Mitisubishi Mirage.

The one-to-one conferencing also enabled students to ask me questions. When, in week three, we had written about ourselves, I had also written about myself in response to questions from the students (see Appendix 1 B & C), and had revealed that my wife and I were planning to shift from our turn of the century house into an apartment in a building dating from the early 19th century. In my journal, I recorded the reactions of Asako, one of the most active learners in the group, to this.

Asako asked me why we were shifting into an old house when Japanese preferred new houses. This was a nice example of a student having the initiative to pursue a point in something which the teacher had told the class. She has made the same point in her essay About Myself, which shows that she is regarding it as a dialogue with the reader. Good!

What then was the effect of written responses and conferencing on the students' written product? What improvements do we find in Mitsuo's *shopping* essay? Here is his third draft.

I like shopping in England. Because leather and food are very inexpensive. But maybe this is only Japanese sense. For instance, for leather jacket of same quality, the Japanese price is about 500£, but English price is about 100£. What a different price it is is!

I have been to shopping for three days. I want to buy a bedding because my room is very cold in the morning. Next then I want to buy a new clock because my old clock was broken when my suitcase was dropped by the airline. I bought a bicycle on Sunday. It's 120£ and black colour and very nice but I ride it only one day because it was stolen on Sunday. I don't know why English shops rest on Sunday. Japanese shops don't understand and impossible.

But I like shopping. Shopping is easy because I can use gestures instead at speaking English.

The first obvious improvement is in format. Whereas his first draft was written as a series of individual sentences, each sentence beginning on a new line, his third draft is presented as a series of paragraphs, even if the paragraphing itself could be improved. Apart from the appearance of his text, the writing is more coherent. The reader doesn't have to fill in the

 © Ron White, 1990

gaps by making reference to shared knowledge about the theft of his bicycle and the damage to his clock while in transit from Japan. The draft is not, of course, flawless. We still have the problem over *Japanese shops don't understand and impossible.* And there are errors of tense-- *want* instead of *wanted* -- and of prepositions -- *at* instead of *of.*

My own policy on dealing with such linguistic errors was ambivalent. In fact, so far the students had not asked me to correct their errors, although, as I noted in my journal

> that may be because they can't make their
> wishes known.

I decided, though, to grasp the nettle, and prepared a multi-page hand-out dealing with specific language points that had been present in their *shopping* essays. This document was distributed to them and I went through the instructions:

Going Shopping

Listed below are some patterns and grammar points. These are points from your essays.

1. Study the points.

2. Read your essay on shopping.

3. Find any errors of the kind listed here.

4. Correct your errors.

I circulated around the class, dealing individually with each student, finding one example of an error in their text and referring them to the appropriate section of the hand-out. They were then told to find other examples in their texts. What happened then is recorded in my journal:

> Some sat there doing nothing. I wonder if
> L1 rubrics would help? They don't seem to
> catch on to what is required of them very
> quickly.

All of this led me to consider quite seriously whether I should give more text-based work, following a parallel writing procedure in which we begin with a model text which is then deconstructed in various ways prior to the students producing a parallel text incorporating features of the original. This procedure is summarized below.

| Model Text--->Comprehension/Analysis/Manipulation-------->
| ----->New Input-------->Parallel Text |

Such an approach was not in line with the methodology which we had agreed to adopt, and so I decided that it was too early to consider abandoning a fundamental principle of our pedagogical practice by putting more emphasis on product than on process.

 © Ron White, 1990

Daunted but determined, we approached week 4. The topic for this week was to be *A Room of my Own*. This would tie in with the week's theme, the environment, which students were working on for a project, while at the same time giving them a topic about which they should be able to write and which the teachers might find interesting. It might also lead to a comparison between their room in the hall of residence and their own room at home in Japan.

The writing was to follow two main steps. Firstly, we would begin by describing the classroom. This would enable us to develop the vocabulary, structures and organization required for writing such a description. Secondly, the students would move on to describing their own hall of residence room. The teachers' notes for the first stage suggest a number of activities intended to get the students thinking about what would be involved in describing a room for a reader who hadn't seen the room concerned.

---

1. Ask students to close their eyes, and to think of four things about the room they are sitting in -- its size, shape, colour, things in it, view, etc.

2. Tell them to open their eyes, and, without looking around them, to write down these four things. What they write can be in words or phrases.

3. Ask them to compare what they have written. Elicit some of these and write on board.

4. What is striking about the things they have noticed? If you wanted to describe the room to someone so that they could actually picture it in their minds, which of the things they have noticed would be included? What <u>other</u> things would have to be included?

5. Discuss how they <u>feel</u> about the room. Individually, have them write down three words which describe their <u>feelings</u> about the room.

6. Say that you are all going to write a description of the room for someone in one of the other Gyosei classes. Ask these questions:

What will my reader already know about this classroom?

What will my reader need to know in order to have a good 'picture' of the room?

Start writing a description on the board, using the answers to the questions and the ideas already produced in steps 1 to 5.

Make it clear that it is necessary to

- establish a common point of reference with the reader, e.g.

With the windows to your right, and the door to your left, you will see a whiteboard on the wall in front of you.

- be systematic in the sequence of the description

- give significant details which add to a feeling of actually being in the room.

With the advanced group, it might be useful to refer to the description of Mr Missier's office, on p.67 of my OUP <u>Writing</u> book in the <u>Supplementary Skills Series</u>.

 © Ron White, 1990

Complete enough of the description to give a reasonably complete picture of the room. Also, board space will determine how much you write.

That, then, was the plan. How did it work out in practice? My journal entry for the day puts it bluntly:

> Blood out of a stone. There appeared to be ignorance of simple vocab., e.g. wall, floor, ceiling. Wrote all instructions on OHT. Did eyes closed,think of four things, etc. On eliciting, it appeared that they hadn't, most of them, understood that they had to write down 4 things about this room. When those who evidently had caught on what it was all about this room (although written on OHT), light dawned.
>
> The business about writing for other Gyosei students didn't seem to work. So, changed from other students as reader to parents. Gave questions:
>
> > What will they know about this room?
> >
> > What will I have to tell them so that they will get a good picture of this room?
>
> Students didn't seem to catch on to this. Then used a series of questions, which, together with answers that were largely teacher supplied, I wrote on OHT.
>
> > Q: Where is this room?
> >
> > A: My classroom is in Foxhill. This is an old building near the lake on Whiteknights campus. The classroom has a view of the lake.
> >
> > Q: What is the size and shape of the room?
> >
> > A: The room is rectangular and is about 15 m long and about 6 m wide.
> >
> > Etc., etc.

Having, by this means, established the parameters within which students were to write about their own rooms, we moved on to step two. My notes, written in class at the time, show that the students were indeed writing, but that

> all of them keep one thumb in the dictionaries. Should the dictionaries be removed during this phase of writing?
>
> Takima, whether because he didn't follow the model, or because he really wants to communicate, isn't following the scheme laid down by the classroom description.
>
> Ariko now drawing or writing on her dictionary. She and Asako in animated conversation. Now referring to others -- for confirmation? Atsushi has written one sentence in nearly five minutes. Yumi and Hiroko heads in dictionary.
>
> Takima seems to write a few words, then refers to dictionary. Dictionary gets passed between him and Mitsuo and Masahiri. Takuma discussing something in Japanese.Is not not writing. Now gets dictionary and looks up something. Meanwhile, Mitsuo writes and erases, discusses something with Masahiro, then refers to dictionary.

 © Ron White, 1990

Atsushi has now written 2 sentences. Has dictionary open. He has now written

> My room is in Wells Hall which housed in the Whiteknights campus in Redlands Road. My room is in the third floor and live next door to near kitchen.

He had evidently been looking up kitchen because this was misspelled until he erased and corrected it.

Told students to put aside dictionaries and to write in a mix of Japanese and English for first draft and then to translate.

Several points emerge from these notes. Firstly, existing writing habits developed over years of sentence translation from Japanese to English meant that the students were evidently unable to break out of a familiar way of writing. This appeared to involve working sentence by sentence, each sentence being conceived in Japanese and then translated, with the aid of a dictionary, into English. This process was married to the use of a pencil and eraser, all students working in essentially the same way, as I noted earlier.

Unfortunately, this sentence-by-sentence approach, particularly when interrupted by frequent dictionary reference, seemed to me as an observer to militate against producing the easy flow of ideas that was part of the approach which we were trying to develop. Sentence-by-sentence writing, with a focus on local language features, also means that cognitive space is taken up by low level concerns, while global concerns -- particularly attention to the reader's requirements -- are likely to be given little or no space.

Secondly, though there was some consultation going on among students, it was impossible to ascertain exactly what the content and purpose of the discussions were. The obvious way of finding out was to ask the students. Yet, I felt that to do so could break into the composing efforts that they were making. Furthermore, I was wary of getting involved in an exchange in which, for lack of a common language, we would each end up either mystified or frustrated or both by my inept attempts to share our thoughts. So, the consultation among students was noted, but no further attempts were made to find out what was actually going on.

Thirdly, however carefully planned and prepared, no lesson ever works out quite as intended!

Fortunately, the results of their writing -- which they had to complete out of class -- were mildly encouraging, as I noted in my journal:

> Students show progress. Yumi wrote a lot and pretty accurate. Some showed sense of feeling -- limited but there. Some followed example done in class re size,shape, etc. Shun applied orientation in his, with left and right. Encouraging.

So, in spite of feeling rather depressed at the end of the lesson, I now had some reason for feeling that more had happened than had actually appeared in the lesson itself.

In the following lesson, the students' descriptions were returned together with my response and some notes on how to make use of the teacher's response (see Appendix 2) because by now it had become clear that the students were not sure how to exploit the written response which took me so much time and effort to prepare. Handing out the document was not enough, though. The students had to be told to read it through, and I found that I was competing with some photographs which two of the girls found more interesting than the hand-out that they had been given.

In addition to going over the response hand-out, I took the students through the description of my own room on the OHP. This description, in which I principle of reformulation, had

been written to include some of the language and organizational points which the students' own descriptions lacked. I pointed out the use of useful sentence structures, e.g. *What I most enjoy about my room is....* and many students copied this down. I also referred them to the use of *there is/are* and I had to tell them to find other examples in the text.

The next part of the lesson was intended to drive home the point that a good description will tell readers everything needed to enable them to obtain a good mental picture of the room. The students were asked to draw a plan of their partner's room, using only the information in their partner's text. This, according to my notes, became

> quite animated, although they didn't seem to see the point that they should only use what had been written.

This may have been due to unclear instructions on my part. Even so, there was much consultation and, in some cases, there was meticulous drawing. However, I felt that the point of the exercise had become lost in the concern with the draftsmanship.

By now we had reached half term, so week five was devoted to tests and a change of activities. For the test, the students were asked to write about their homes in Japan, thus giving them an opportunity to pick up on some of the work that they had done when describing their rooms. In the first part of the writing test, they were told to write their first draft without reference to their dictionary. In the second part, they were told to work on their second draft,which would be the one to be assessed, though both drafts were to be handed in. The arrival of their writing in my in-tray coincided with a particularly busy period, so when, on 30th May, I came to return their scripts, I found that I didn't have time to prepare individual responses as had been the custom up till then.

My journal notes record that some students were continuing to write their first draft in Japanese and then apparently translating to produce the second draft in English. Others, however, wrote most of their first drafts in English, with some Japanese words. Subsequently, I discussed this with Asako, who had drafted in Japanese and then translated. Although she is one of the most active members of the class, she is, to judge from her verbal behaviour, an over monitor user. From our discussion, it seems that she writes first in Japanese as a safeguard and she sees translation as a way of ensuring the accuracy of her writing -- in other words, accuracy of language takes priority. I suggested to her that she might try to write her drafts in English -- with Japanese when she lacked the English needed -- and that this might help her to write better. She agreed to try.

Meanwhile, looking ahead to the lesson in which I would return their test essays, I

> prepared a parallel text on my home, incorporating where I could items which had appeared incorrectly in students' test essays. Inevitably, I missed some, as I discovered later when I was going through their essays with them. I put my essay onto an OHT, as well as preparing paper copies, and went to class.

In class, I returned their test essays and distributed a paper copy of my own essay, and then went read it aloud, highlighting particular points, including organization and language items such as *there is/are*. This was a pattern which I had also dealt with in an earlier lesson, and it occurred to me that some students simply may not recognize when they need to use a pattern because in another composition written soon after the earlier introduction to *there is/are*, one of the students had written

> It have three mountains and six lakes in there
> land. Finally, it have one middle mountain and two
> little lakes and one big lakes.

In what was clearly a context for the use of *there is/are* , the pattern had not been used. This it seemed to me had some implications for the provision of feedback through both reformulation and overt correction. Showing, telling and even demonstrating to students

that a particular pattern or mode of expression exists will not always lead to that item being used in subsequent writing.

Having gone through my text on the OHP, I told the students to read the paper copy and then to read their own essay and finally to compare the two to find items in my essay which would help them improve their own. In my journal, I noted that

> since their comprehension of English is so low, I'm not sure that this was understood. Again,I think I should have modeled the process on the OHT. I had thought to do this, but wondered whether picking specific examples from the students' own work would be a downer for them, and I didn't have time to either make up or choose examples from work in other classes.
>
> Some students don't seem to catch on to what they are supposed to do. When they are shown individually, they seem to see the point, but until then they tend simply to look at their papers. Also, only a few of them have highlighters, although again I reminded them of their usefulness and suggested that they each buy one.

There was at least one pleasant surprise,though, because the one student who seemed to be least engaged by what went on in class had taken note of what we were doing. Although his essay was full of linguistic errors, it showed possibilities as far as content was concerned.

> His penciled notes showed some attention had been paid to my essay and he had included a very amusing but apposite extra sentence following a list of items in the family sitting room, which included a lot of potted plants. The added sentence made the point that he felt trapped in a jungle with so many potted plants in the room.

We were now into the second half of the term and it had become clear that what we were doing in class had to be seen in the context of the social pressures of the student group as a whole. Virtually none of the students had known each other before coming to Reading, so they were going through those stages in group formation which Handy (1985) has characterized as forming, norming, storming and performing. There had already been some storming among a few of the young men, and we heard of examples of the more active students in class being criticized by others. Thus, the norms of conformity and of not standing out from the group were being exerted. Even so, it appeared that some students had established their own objectives and were prepared to ignore such pressures in their attempt to achieve their own goals.

Attempts in the writing classes to use co-operative learning had to take account of the dynamics of the group, and this required a measure of insight which was not speedily developed during the twice weekly meetings with the class. It was difficult to see what friendship patterns were emerging within each class, although repeated seating patterns indicated preferences. One feature which continued throughout the term was seating by sexes. The girls always sat across the back of the class, while two groups of boys sat along the sides, with the teacher making up the fourth side of the square. No attempt was made to disturb this arrangement, although from time to time students were put into mixed groups. Usually,though, students worked with their neighbour, which generally meant working with someone of the same sex.

In our next writing class a small incident occurred which was quite revealing. The session was to be based on brainstorming ideas, moving from individual to group brainstorming and following a procedure which I had used successfully with other students. The brainstorming was to be the first stage in a sequence of activities, summarized in the teachers' notes as follows:

 © Ron White, 1990

Monday:	Brainstorm, discuss, select, organize, begin Draft 1
Tuesday:	Revise draft 1 in conference with teacher Use attached questions to shape conference Give draft 2 to teacher for copying and distribution to readers
Wednesday	Distribute essays to readers who are to respond to them
Thursday	Student readers return essays to teacher to be returned to the writers
Friday	Essays returned to writers
Monday Week 7	Review how readers responded. How can their responses be used to improve the essays?

One of my colleagues attended the class as an observer, and her notes reveal that there was considerable confusion among students as to what I expected them to do. The confusion may have begun at the start of the lesson, when I asked the students to suggest some essay topics for me to write about. One student, Yumi, interpreted this to mean that she had to write an essay for me, and so she began writing very quickly:

> Yesterday I went to the restaurant to eat
> Japanese food.

Others wrote nothing, and I repeated my instructions, using the whiteboard as an aid. The students then understood what I wanted, because Yumi now wrote two topics very quickly: *My other country friends*, and *Invited friends*. She subsequently erased the second topic when I queried it. I also urged students to copy a word from their dictionary as most had still to write down a topic suggestion. When most had done this, I collected the slips of paper bearing the topics and put them in a box. My observer colleague wrote:

> This aroused obvious interest? pleasure? consternation?

I then wrote *Brainstorming . How to get ideas for an essay* on the whiteboard and invited the students to pick a topic from the box. *About my summer vacation in Britain* was selected, and I started jotting notes on the board. Meanwhile, Yumi talked with a friend, while Koreyuki, another student being observed by my colleague, watched me. Then Yumi studied her dictionary, while Koreyuki continued to watch me. I then clarified the notes which I had written up, and both observed students attended. Next, I pointed out connections between items on the board as a way of leading in to the principle of categorizing ideas. I asked students questions about which ideas should be grouped together, but no one answered.

After a second such activity, we proceeded to the next task. I distributed slips of paper to each student and told them to write separate ideas on each piece of paper. I then wrote the topic on the board: *A Woman's Place is in the Home.* There was no reaction from Yumi or Koreyuki. My colleague's notes continue:

> Y looks as if she's thinking then puts pen near paper.
> K stares. T says no dictionary. Then T says you can use
> Japanese. Y discusses instruction with neighbour. K
> stares. Ss confer amongst each other in Japanese -- don't

 © Ron White, 1990

understand.

At this point, there was a significant intervention by Mitsuo. Whereas the girls appeared to be all at sea, he had caught on to what was required, and he explained the topic and procedure to the others in Japanese. This was the critical incident referred to earlier, and it was important for two reasons. Firstly, it showed that an individual could emerge in a go-between role without appearing to break ranks. Secondly, it underlined the difficulty of managing classroom procedures when students and teacher lack a shared means of communication, either linguistic and experiential. And thirdly, it showed how useful an interpreter can be under such circumstances.

Following Mituso's timely intervention, the students got to work. However, my own notes and those of my colleague show how difficult it is, without recourse to other data, such as retrospective accounts by the students themselves, to find out what was going on inside the students' heads. My notes show that

> Takuma sat and thought for several minutes.
> Naofumi wrote in Japanese.
> Mitsuo wrote three points in 5 minutes, and referred to his dictionary while doing so. He began all his:
>
> About women....
> About women....
>
> Three girls wrote entirely in Japanese.
> Atusushi in five minutes had written down nothing.
> Takuma then wrote on a slip of paper:
>
> *The Chancellor the Exchequer.*
>
> I said that that was a good point. Subsequently, he used this as the opening of his essay.
>
> Hiroko asked for a recap. on the instructions. She wanted to know if she had to use ideas from the whiteboard.
>
> Masahiro was delving into his dictionary. Was told to write in Japanese. Obviously he thought he was being asked to write it all in Japanese. Explained that he could use some Japanese words within English sentences.

When the students had prepared a number of points, I asked them to give them to me to write on the board. My colleague's notes take up the story.

> Nominates one S ; but Y doesn't listen. She's still discussing translation.
> K doesn't listen -- is still looking in dictionary.
> T approaches Y -- she giggles (anxiously?).
>
> T records one note from everyone on board.
> Y stops paying attention. K examines hole in jeans.
> Y and K still not attending.
> Y is looking at something else.
> T asks Ss to contribute orally. Y doesn't attend. K nervous but listening.
> When T asks Y she says 'No'. (Hasn't been listening)
> T starts to talk to class again.Y listening. K writing (correcting? looking busy?)
> Y asks a question about word meaning.
> T asks which ideas go together. Not sure Ss have understood.
> K writing something on a new sheet of paper.
> Ss not really contributing -- T taking over the categorizing himself. When T asks about women in Japanese government, K is interested. K has written a list of words (1).
> T reiterates notion of classification. Y and K stare (don't follow?)

 © Ron White, 1990

Clearly, although the students, thanks to Mitsuo's intervention, had understood the topic, they had not understood what was involved in categorizing ideas. Since this was integral part of the procedure, such a lack of understanding did not bode well for the development of organizing skills which was one of my objectives. Indeed, by this time I had reached the point of no return in the lesson and, although my attempts at introducing the categorization of ideas had not worked at all well, I decided to press on with the writing stage on the grounds that at least the students would have written something. My colleague noted that

> Y begins quickly but K writes title twice.
> No evidence of anyone looking at the board or making a plan.
> After 10 mins Y had written 5 lines.
> After 10 mins K had written 5 lines.
> Neither Y nor K writing fluently.
> K circled and made lines on his essay!
> K is rewriting his.
> Y is stuck.

I emerged from this class with a distinct feeling of failure. My colleague felt that the two tasks -- brainstorming and categorisation -- were difficult and she

> wasn't convinced that they even got the hang of what was required, and I suspect that when they came to write their essays they did so in the usual way, without reference to the techniques which had been introduced in this session. However, I think this was because the techniques were unfamiliar rather than inherently difficult, and the problem could probably be overcome by adjustments of two kinds:
>
> 1. The topic could have been more concrete.
> 2. A tighter structure could be provided by the insertion of enabling activities, e.g. a simple word-association game to begin with; an intermediate task (to precede the composition) where students imply classified given ideas, followed by group discussion.

In mitigation, one of the other teachers working with a higher level group, reported considerable success with the brainstorming and categorization activities.

In the event, all the students produced their essays and these were then exchanged between classes, with a set of questions provided by one of the other teachers to guide their response to their partner's text. The partners' responses together with the essays were then returned to the original writers. The reaction to all this in my class was 'very taciturn' and I observed that they

> didn't give any reactions and their own reading of their own essays and response not at all animated. Not at all certain that students gained much from this exercise.

This did not deter me from trying out a new procedure based on a set of questions as heuristic device. Taking *festivals* as the topic, I issued a set of questions on definition, comparison, relationship, circumstances and testimony. The idea is that such question sets can be used as a prompt to generate ideas on a wide range of topics. The questions that I had used proved to be difficult and I concluded that the students needed more language in order to be able to cope with the questions as given. Indeed, the term *definition* proved to abstract, so I asked for examples of festivals, and we did a spidergram on the board:

 © Ron White, 1990

Mitsuo, Masahiro and Atsushi worked together. Mitsuo came to ask if a festival was a carnival -- obviously the definition offered in his bilingual dictionary. I said that a carnival was a festival, but not all festivals are carnivals. I gave them the *Cobuild* dictionary, and they looked up the definition, which is good, giving festivals = anniversaries, religious occasions, and festivals = organized events. Mitsuo et al. copied down the *Cobuild* definition.

We worked through the other questions, and did a spidergram of things which people do at festivals, e.g. wear special clothes, dance, sing, eat special food, etc. The students, and especially the girls, copied items from the board. Then they were told to write about a Japanese festival. Most chose New Year. Mitsuo asked if it were permissible to compare New Year and Christmas, and I encouraged him to do so.

Reviewing the lesson in my journal, I concluded that the work that we had done

> had not, on the whole, seemed to influence the way the students write. It is very difficult to decide whether the students have been influenced.What are the overt, behavioural signs of writing and of changes?

I ended the journal entry by saying that

> maybe the most benefit to be derived from the approach so far used is the round of drafting and redrafting following a response. The disconcerting thing is that observing their first drafts, there doesn't seem to have been much improvement at any level -- language or composing.

With this rather pessimistic note, I entered the final week of the term when the lessons were to be disrupted by the presence of a video crew filming for a promotion tape for the college. I returned some recipes which students had written the previous week, and we ran through some of the language points during which

> It became blindingly clear as I was going over the business of *cut* and *slice* being either verbs or nouns, as demonstrated in the sentences in the notes, that the SS didn't really have much idea of what a verb or a noun was. On the WB I had written:
>
> **cut** **Cut** the meat into portions.
> Ask the butcher for a good **cut** of beef.
>
> **slice** **Slice** the meat finely.
> Put a **slice** of meat into a heated pan.
>
> Pointing to the nouns, I asked what part of speech they were. No response. I then asked what kind of words had *a* before them. No response.

 © Ron White, 1990

Meanwhile, I had referred to Koreyuki's error:

a thin some slices of pork.

There wasn't much response to this, so I built a table on the WB, with SS actually contributing some items:

1	2	3	4
a	thin	slice	of pork
some		slices	of beef
any	thick	pieces	of meat
		piece	

I then asked them what was wrong the error. Not much sign of life. So, I pointed out that you could only have one item from each of the numbered columns, and that the error arose from having gotten items out of sequence, viz. 1 2 1 3 4. Light seemed to dawn.

What all this suggested was that some work on the formal identification of parts of speech and on basic English clause structure should have been done right from the start.

Likewise, when I attended to a common error -- I go there to shopping -- I built up a table on the WB:

I went	to town	to shop.
	to London	to visit the Tower.
	etc.	etc.

and then referred to Takuma's error

People go to sea to swimming.

There wasn't much indication that they had realized that one and the same structure was being used. Again, some work on such structures is indicated.

The topic in this final week of term was *summer.* For once, England was enjoying an exceptional summer, and for the past month we had been sweltering in our classroom, with students nodding off in the balmy weather. So, I had given them an open essay on this topic, encouraging them to use a loopwriting technique to identify the main idea of their essay before writing their second draft. They had also been encouraged to use words and phrases which would help to tell their reader about the feelings and sensations that they were trying to describe.

Because of the disruption to our work at this point in the term, I hadn't had an opportunity to read and respond to their drafts, so

I took some of their essays on *Summer* and wrote them paragraph by paragraph on the WB, and then showed how to improve them. Mitsuo had written a not bad piece in two paras, one comparing summer in Japan and England, and the other about what he plans to do this summer. He scribbled emendations on his first draft. I'm not sure how commited to what we were doing the others were. I dealt with Takuma's and Masahiro's in the same way.

The problems are the time spent on writing on the WB -- having them on OHT would have been better, but I didn't think of it. However, when they are on OHT, it's not so easy to erase and rewrite as it is on the WB.

 © Ron White, 1990

I've asked them to hand in a second, improved draft incorporating the work that we did. We'll see if they do so, given that it's the end of term. It would be nice if they did, though, as I think that there have been signs of improvement. Both Mitsuo and Masahiro produced pretty good two paragraph essays, and even Taka managed a full page, most of which made some sense, although he has a tendency to string together lexical items without any regard to syntax.

And so the term ended. Some of them did hand in a second, improved draft and the effects of the classroom work can be seen in Mituso's two versions in Appendix 3.

Did the Students' Writing Improve?

I wanted to avoid the elaborate ways of measuring improvement in students' writing which would be required in a rigorous piece of research. Such measures call for careful analysis and quantification and a great deal more time than was available within the constraints of this case study. So, I took five samples of Mitsuo's work, including the first draft of one composition written in the following term, when I was no longer teaching his class. These texts were given to two groups of graduate students taking my written language option. One group of eight students assessed the texts using a non analytic marking scheme, while the second group of seven students used the analytic marking scheme devised for the TEEP test by one of my colleagues, Cyril Weir (see Weir 1988 and Appendix 4 for the TEEP scale). The results for the two groups are summarized below.

Group A: Non analytic marking out of 20

Marker/ Essay	1	2	3	4	5
A	20	50	40	45	65
B	10	18	25	35	40
C	50	60	75	80	70
D*	10	25	70	45	35
E	40	80	80	80	90
F*	35	50	45	50	55
G	20	65	70	55	60
H	35	50	65	60	85
N = 8					
Average	28	50	59	56	63

Group B: Analytic Marking Scheme (TEEP Scale)

Marker/Essay	1	2	3	4	5
I	43	83	63	63	83
J*	45	67	62	74	67
K	29	71	71	52	76
L	29	57	62	48	67
M*	14	57	52	48	43
M	24	67	57	67	76
O	9	57	38	52	33
N = 7					
Average	28	66	58	58	64

*** Native English speaker**

I do not propose to dwell on the overall similarity of the average marks between the two marking procedures. What the scores in both cases show is that there was judged to be a considerable improvement from text 1 (Shopping, Draft 1) to text 2 (Shopping, Draft 3).

 © Ron White, 1990

The marks then remain on a plateau. However, as the subsequent texts being evaluated were first drafts, the leveling off tends to obscure the fact that Mitsuo's work had undoubtedly improved and that the markers using the TEEP scale could identify specific features of his writing which gave demonstration of improvement.

Of the four native English speaking markers, J in Group B has considerable experience of marking work written by Japanese undergraduates. Indeed, just before dealing with Mituso's samples, he had marked dozens of end of year examination scripts of his own Japanese college students. Discussing the mark plateau from script 2 onwards, he suggested that so great was the improvement from draft 1 to draft 2 in all TEEP categories, it was not surprising that there would be a considerable increase in the marks, whereas the subsequent texts exhibited no such quantum leap. It is also notable that text 5, written the following term, was judged to be worse than text 4, produced several months previously, and J's detailed marks indicate a decline in language attributes rather than organization and content.

It is also notable that M, the other native English speaking marker in Group B, had no previous experience of marking the work of Japanese students, and that her initial mark of 14 reflects expectations formed from marking work of students having a higher linguistic base than in Mitsuo's case. Although the work produced by J's own students was of a conspicuously higher level than Mitsuo's, J's approach to marking Mitsuo's work was, unlike M's, based on expectations formed from dealing with written work within the same range of linguistic and organizational competence. Thus, for M, Mitsuo's first draft could only score very low on all attributes. Indeed, she awarded zero in attributes 3,4,5,6 and 7, whereas J awarded 1 for the same attributes.

So, then, there is some evidence from the marking of Mitsuo's compositions that there was measurable improvement in his written work and in so far as he can be taken to represent his class as a whole, there was overall improvement and this reflects the impression gained by all three teachers. What, though, of the student themselves?

Students' Views

It was very difficult to obtain a statement of student views on such matters, partly for linguistic reasons, but mostly for cultural reasons. Although they are astute and critical consumers of goods and services, Japanese will avoid face to face criticism, so eliciting student views directly was not likely to be successful, so we resorted to two less direct means.

Firstly, I asked a bilingual Japanese colleague at the college to discuss what we were doing with my own class. What emerged from this was that the students were interested in the methodology being employed, and that they appreciated the trouble and care that went into the written responses to what they had written. However, they still wanted more language focused guidance.

Secondly, students in all groups were asked to complete anonymously an end of term evaluation of the quality and quantity of all course components, and the results appear below. Twenty-seven students out of thirty-four responded.

 © Ron White, 1990

Quality	My students	All students
too easy	1	1
too difficult	2	3
just right	9	24
Quantity		
too much	3	3
not enough	1	7
just right	4	14

Comments from all students included the following:

> I think writing class is be short (sic)
> I am not good at the writing
> I like this class very much. I hope I can have 10 or 15 minutes break during this class.
> Writing class is fun. Sometimes it's difficult but I like it.

So, then, students were satisfied with the classes according to the rather gross characteristics specified in the end of term evaluation.

What Have I Learnt?

What I have learnt can be dealt with from several viewpoints: the personal, the pedagogic and the academic. I shall begin with the personal because this, more than any other, tends to be ignored -- or at least hidden -- in most accounts, and yet I feel that it is the personal response to the experience that leads to the relatability of case studies of this kind.

I entered the experience with considerable enthusiasm for and commitment to the pedagogical approach which we had agreed upon to me, the theory, research and teaching carried out under the umbrella of the process approach has been one of the most exciting developments in my teaching career. I was determined to make it work, and keen to try out and develop techniques and procedures. Above all, I was interested to meet the challenge of working with a group whose combination of age and linguistic level was outside my teaching experience.

My personal reactions on being met by a biddable but taciturn student group was one of concern, turning at times to frustration and depression. My own commitment to the methodology I had espoused was such that it was difficult to tolerate what appeared to be the less than enthusiastic response of the students. Their own difficulties in coping with the procedures I was attempting to use had to be set against my own anxiety to bring about change in students' behaviour. When things appeared to work well, I was delighted; but when things didn't seem to go according to plan, I was upset.

Throughout I had to temper my enthusiasm and commitment. Yet, without such commitment, it would have been easy to give up and to revert to a methodology that was less challenging to the students' expectations and my own patience. Even so, I have to express some doubts. Am I simply acting as a change agent intent on imposing a new orthodoxy? When dealing with any innovation, it is essential to consider the adopter's perception of it, and this is something which I failed to do, partly for reasons which I hope have been made clear in the narrative. Thus, my own understanding of what I was doing is incomplete, because essentially I have only one part of the picture -- my own.

I am also concerned about the ethics of what I was doing, and here we come to philosophical questions as to the educational value of the approach. I am assuming that, through the methodology I was using, I was empowering the students by giving them alternative means of composing in English in ways that would result in more effective communication with their reader. In doing this, I was requiring them to adopt a new repertoire of behaviours which were at odds with what they were used to and what they felt

 © Ron White, 1990

comfortable with. I was asking them to take a risk, to choose from the menu that I had set out before them in the belief that it would be nourishing and wholesome. Can I be sure that I wasn't imposing a view of writing, that I wasn't, in a way, indoctrinating them in a new orthodoxy? Both personally and professionally, I find this issue worrying.

Having raised these doubts, I should like now to turn from the personal to the pedagogic. I take the view that every lesson is an experiment, and that some experiments work well while other give rise to unexpected difficulties, from which it is possible to learn as a teacher. In many ways, what I have learnt as a teacher is obvious, but it is only through experience that the obvious can become part of one's own development. What I have learnt can be summed up in one two words: always adapt.

Virtually everything I did with my class called for adaptation, both from my original lesson plan and from the procedures as originally conceived. Mostly the adaptation was in terms of deconstructing procedures and making use of enabling procedures so that students would move have developed the sub skills or acquired the understandings needed to follow the techniques to which they were being introduced. But adaptation was also required in terms of our own expectations as teachers. The objectives with which we began the course proved to be too ambitious, given the time scale. We had to adjust these expectations and to realize that the kinds of changes that we sought would take time -- a lot more time than the ten week term dealt with in this account.

Such care in making the content and procedures of a lesson accessible to the learners is, of course, an essential part of skilled pedagogy, as is the effective management of the classroom and the activities and people in it. I still feel the need to develop such managerial aspects so as to provide a structured environment which will support the learners with an organizational scaffolding that will eventually become redundant. In short, it is dealing with the problem of keeping a group of students productively occupied while working simultaneously on disparate activities.

The mixture of individual and group activities demonstrated how significant the social organization and culture of the group can be. While pair and group work are used as a means of learning within the pedagogical approach that I employed, the effective use of what is essentially co-operative learning depends on the functioning of the group as a social unit. Indeed, it essential for successful performance over a period of time to maintain a balance among social, task and individual needs. As I noted in the narrative, the group of young people with whom I was working were themselves going through stages of group formation so that my assumption that certain co-operative procedures could be used successfully failed to take into account the dynamics of the group. This aspect of the methodology requires further investigation.

Finally, there are the academic aspects of the work reported here. What this work has exemplified is an attempt to translate cognitive writing theory into practical classroom application. What I have been doing is trying to make sense of this experience, but in doing so I have raised questions which will require investigations of a more rigorous kind. What I hope, however, is that the pursuit of academic rigour will not entail a move away from the classroom context where the encounter of academic theory with the multiple realities of the teaching-learning situation can challenge both the theoretician and the practitioner, providing useful insights for both by laying it on the line.

References

Arndt, V. (1987) *Six writers in search of texts: a protocol-based study of L1 and L2 writing*, ELT Journal, 41/4:257-267.

Handy, C.C. (1985 3rd edition) Understanding Organizations. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin.

 © Ron White, 1990

Hudelson, S. (1989) *Writing in a second language*,. Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 9: 210-222.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, S., &Tetroe, J. (1987) *Composing in a second language*, in A. Matsuhashi (ed) Writing in Real Time: Modelling Production Processes. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Keller, Maria A., & Mitrano-Neto, N. (1987) *Responding to Students' writing: A pilot study.* Paper presented at LABCI Congress, Rio de Janeiro, July 1987.

Mohan, B.A., & Au-Yuen Lo, W. (1985) *Academic writing and Chinese students: transfer and developmental factors.* TESOL Quarterly, 19/3.

Raimes, A. (1985) *What unskilled ESL students do as they write: a classroom study of composing.* TESOL Quarterly, 19/2: 229-258.

Raimes, A. (1987) *Language proficiency, writing ability and composing strategies: a study of ESL college student writing.* Language Learning, 37/3: 439-469.

Rob, T., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986) *Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing quality.* TESOL Quarterly, 20/1:83-95.

Spack, R. (1988) *Initiating ESL students into the academic discourse community: How far should we go?* TESOL Quarterly, 22/1.

Urzua, C. (1987) *'You stopped too soon': Second language children composing and revising.* TESOL Quarterly, 19/1: 79-101.

Weir, C. (1987) Communicative Language Testing with Special Reference to English as a Foreign Language. Vol 11, Exeter Linguistic Studies. Exeter: University of Exeter.

Zamel, V. (1983) *The composing process of six advanced ESL students: six case studies* TESOL Quarterly, 17/2: 165-187.

Zamel, V. (1987) *Recent research on writing pedagogy.* TESOL Quarterly, 21/4: 697-715.

Zamel, V. (1988) *Writing through students' eyes.* Paper presented at TESOL Convention, Chicago, 1988.

Acknowledgements

Two teachers in Brazil, Maria Keller and Nelson Mitrano-Neto, taking their lead from Ann Raimes, provided the idea for the personalized response to students' work in the fashion reported here, while my colleagues on the Gyosei English Language Course, Adrienne Short and Anna Langford, were enthusiastic fellow workers in the vineyard, and Margaret Matthews, the fourth member of the Gyosei team, provided thoughtful observation notes and comments. Students on Module 2 of the MATEFL, Lent term 1990, marked Mitsuo's essays and contributed helpful discussion. Without the Gyosei students during the Summer Term I would have nothing to report, and without Mitsuo's essays, we would have had nothing to read. To everyone, my thanks.

Paper prepared for 24th TESOL Convention, San Francisco, 6 - 10 March 1990.

 © Ron White, 1990

Appendix 1

Week Three: Writing About Ourselves

A. Teachers' Lesson Notes

Autobiography. At the beginning of a course, it is common for the teacher and students to get to know one another. It is also useful for the teacher to find out what the students' writing is like by getting them to write something. Thus, a description of oneself is a legitimate and useful topic, while writing for each other has a useful social function. A further benefit is that the activity can give rise to useful practice of such grammatical items as question forms and tenses, e.g. the present perfect, the past simple.

Procedure

1. Tell the students to work on a set of questions they would like the teacher to answer about him or herself. Elicit the questions and write them on the board.

2. Tell the students which questions you are prepared to answer and which ones you are not. This is important because of the cultural differences and expectations as between teacher and students. For instance, in some cultures, questions of age or income are taboo, while in others there are no such inhibitions. By discussing such issues, a sense of etiquette is established, itself an important aspect of writing.

3. Add questions of your own which you would like to ask the students.

4. Tell students to say what questions they are prepared to answer, and those which they are not.

5. Both teacher and students then write answers to the questions. This forms the basis of the first draft.

6. Students then evaluate the first draft, using this set of questions as a basis. Other questions can be suggested by the students themselves.

> **1. Have I answered all the questions?**
> **2. Are my answers clear enough? Do I need to give more information? Will my reader be puzzled by some of the information I have given?**
> **3. Could I reorganize the information?**
> **4. Are there any points on which I need help?**

7. Students write a second draft. Before they begin, they should ask

> **How can I make my reader interested in reading my description?**
> **What is an interesting way to begin?**
> **How can I keep the reader interested? e.g. what is interesting about me?**
> **How can I end in an interesting way?**

8. Have students read their autobiography aloud to their partner.

9. Tell students to point to

> a) the most interesting part of the text or to the thing they liked.
> b) the least interesting part.

10. Tell students to suggest one improvement which the writer could make.

11. Students are now to write the third draft.

12. When the third draft is completed, they can use the **student marking code** (separate document). They should read through their draft for language and mechanical features, correcting these. In addition, they should mark their text, using the conventions given in the student marking code, before handing the draft in to the teacher.

Example of questions

Here is a set of questions given to students, based on the above procedure, and the answers which one of them gave. A similar set of questions was answered by the teacher.

1. What is your name?
   My name is Abdelkrim.

2. Where are you from?
   from Algeria

3. What did you study at University?
   Biologie

4. What do you hope to study in Britain?
   Biotechnologie

5. Do you know a lot of English?
   quiet

6. How old are you?
   23 years

7. For how many years did you study English at school?
   5 years

8. What do you like doing?
   reading, sport

9. What don't you like doing?
   smoking

10. Is this the first time that you have come to Britain?
    Yeal

B. RVW's reply to students' questions, presented on OHT

Writing About Myself

1. What countries have you visited?

I have visited about forty countries, including Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Turkey – and Japan.

2. Have you ever been to Japan?

Yes, I have. I went there about five years ago.

3. What kind of sport do you like?

I don't like sport, although I go jogging.

4. Do you know about Ninja, Samurai and Geisha?

Yes, I know about samurai and geishas, but I don't know about ninja.

5. When did you go to the barber?

Last week – on Thursday, I think

6. How do you like Japan?

Very much. Japan is a fascinating country.

7. What is the best tasting beer in the UK?

I don't know. But my son, who works three nights a week as a barman in a pub, says that it depends on the kind of taste you like. He likes Burton best and he says that Brakespeare's, Courage and Morlands are 'crap'.

8. Where do you live?

In a large Victorian house in Reading, about five minute bike ride from the University. But next month, we hope to shift to a new flat in a beautiful old house in Caversham.

9. What are you interested in?

Many things. Art and architecture, music and food. I also like photography.

10. What hobby do you have?

Travel. Photography.

C. RVW's text, presented on OHT

Like you, I was born on a Pacific island, only my birthplace is in the southern hemisphere, whereas yours is in the northern. Since leaving New Zealand nearly thirty years ago, I have lived in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and England, and I have visited about forty countries, including Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, France, Germany, Indonesia, India, Italy, Turkey, the USA -- and Japan.

I went to Japan about five years ago. I think it is a fascinating country. It is also a shopper's paradise. I bought some very attractive lacquered trays in a big department store in Tokyo. I also enjoyed eating Japanese food, although some of it looks better than it tastes. My favourite Japanese food is sushi, and everywhere I went in Japan, I asked my friends to take me to a sushi bar so that I could try new types of sushi.

Unfortunately, my family haven't accompanied me on most of my overseas visits, although my children were born in Fiji nearly nineteen years ago. They are twins. My daughter, Sarah, is going to University in Leeds in October to take a degree in French and Italian. My son, Damon, is at college and is sitting his A levels next month. He doesn't study at all hard, and has devoted most of his time to rowing, which is his favourite sport. He hopes to be a very successful rower.

At the moment, my wife, who is English, and our children and I all live in a large Victorian house built in 1896. It is about five minutes bike ride from the University. Next month, we hope to shift to a newly built flat in a beautiful old house built in 1828 in Caversham. Like many English people, we prefer old houses to new ones.

I spend a lot of time working, including reading Gyosei students' essays. When I have some free time, I like to listen to classical music, to do some work in my garden and to go for walks in the countryside with my wife. Like many English people, we would like to live in the country, but it isn't very practical to do so. For the moment, living in the country will have to remain a dream.

Appendix 2

Making use of your teacher's reply to your essay

When teachers write a reply to your essay, they are replying to the information you have written. It is like a conversation on paper.

The reply will contain ways of helping you to correct or improve your essay. Sometimes, the teacher will ask you questions. The questions may ask for more information, or they may ask you to explain something which is not clear. Here is an example:

What the student wrote

I try to take driving license but I can't.

What the teacher wrote

Do you mean

I tried to take a driving licence, but I failed.
I will try to take a driving licence, but I can't in Britain.

Or what?

In writing his second draft, the student should try to answer the teacher's questions.

Sometimes the teacher will repeat what you have written, but in such a way as to improve the language or expression you have used. In other words, what the teacher writes is a guide to help you to improve when you rewrite your essay. Here is an example:

What the student wrote

British things are too cheeper than Japan. I think that clothes are most cheepest thing than Japan.

What the teacher wrote

I am interested to learn that British things are cheaper than in Japan and that clothes are much cheaper than in Japan. I wonder why?

So, you should read your teacher's reply very carefully, and you should compare what your teacher has written with what you have written. Then you can use what the teacher has written to help improve your second draft. If you want further help, ask your teacher.

Appendix 3

Mitsuo's 1st Draft: Summer

I think English summer is very comfortable, because there is few humidity. So it is very dry. Japanese summer is very hot and there is lots of humidity. So it is very wet and it isn't comfortable. But English summer isn't always hot. It change in tense heat and severe cold.

I'm trying English summer at first. I almost study English in summer holiday and I must go to language school in Coventry for eight weeks, because I can speak English very little. And I'm going to go to Europe trip with my friends after the language school for two weeks. I'm going to go French, Germany, Switzerland, Austria with Soichiro, Masahiro, Atsushi, Taichi, Koreyuki of my friends.

This English summer will be enjoyable.

Mitsuo's Second Draft: Summer

I think the English summer is very comfortable, because there is very little humidity.So it is very dry. The Japanese summer in comparison is very hot and there is lots of humidity, so it is very wet and itsn't comfortable. But English summer isn't always hot, because it can change from intense heat to severe cold very quickly suddenly.

I'm trying the English summer for the first time. I'm studying English for most of the summer vacation holiday. And I must go to a language school in Coventry for eight weeks, because I can speak English only a little. And I'm going to go to the Continent trip with my friends after the language school for two weeks. I'm going to go French, Germany, Switzerland, Austria with Soechiro, Masahiro, Atsushi,Taichi, Koreyuki of my friends. This English summer will be enjoyable.

Appendix 4

TEEP Attribute Writing Scales

Assign a mark under each category and then sum the marks to achieve a total score.

1. Relevance and Adequacy of Content

0. The answer bears almost no relation to the task set. Totally inadequate answer.

1. Answer of limited relevance to the task set. Possibly major gaps in treatment of topic and/or pointless repetition.

2. For the most part answers the task set, though there may be some gaps or redundant information.

3. Relevant and adequate answer to the task set.

2. Compositional Organization

0. No apparent organisation of content.

1. Very little organisation of content. Underlying structure not sufficiently apparent.

2. Some organisational skills in evidence, but not adequately controlled.

3. Overall shape and internal pattern clear. Organisational skills adequately controlled.

3. Cohesion

0. Cohesion almost totally absent. Writing so fragmentary that comprehension of the intended communication is virtually impossible.

1. Unsatisfactory cohesion may cause difficulty in comprehension of most of the intended communication.

2. For the most part satisfactory cohesion though occasional deficiencies may mean that certain parts of the communication are not always effective.

3. Satisfactory use of cohesion resulting in effective communication.

4. Adequacy of Vocabulary for Purpose

0. Vocabulary inadequate even for the most basic parts of the intended communication.

1. Frequent inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps frequent lexical inappropriacies and/or repetition.

2. Some inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Perhaps some lexical inappropriacies and/or circumlocution.

3. Almost no inadequacies in vocabulary for the task. Only rare inappropriate and/or circumlocution.

5. Grammar

0. Almost all grammatical patterns inaccurate.

1. Frequent grammatical inaccuracies.

2. Some grammatical inaccuracies.

3. Almost no grammatical inaccuracies.

6. Mechanical Accuracy 1 (Punctuation)

0. Ignorance of conventions of punctuation.

1. Low standard of accuracy in punctuation.

2. Some inaccuracies in punctuation.

3. Almost no inaccuracies in punctuation.

7. Mechanical Accuracy 2 (Spelling)

0. Almost all spelling inaccurate.

1. Low standard of accuracy in spelling.

2. Some inaccuracies in spelling.

3. Almost no inaccuracies in spelling.